

## 1. Membership

Local membership has increased from 632 in 2013 to 642 households in 2014.

## 2. Winter Talks

Our evening meetings this year have been very well attended. David Anderson (Raptor Conservation) and Dan Watson (Ben Law's Alpine Flora) both attracted audiences of 58, close to our record of 64 (Liz Farrell: Plants in Peril). Talks on Badgers (Chris Sydes), Scottish Amphibians and Reptiles (Chris Cathrine), and Gardening for Insects (Suzanne Bairner) also had numbers in the high 30s – 40s. Our experimental lunch followed by an afternoon talk (Roy Sexton: Carnivorous Plants) undertaken to avoid the problems of travelling in January was also considered a success and will be repeated in 2015.

Next winter 2014 -15 the Raploch Community Centre has been booked for our programme on the 1<sup>st</sup> Tuesday in the month at 7.30pm. There will be a lunch followed by an afternoon meeting in January 2015.

## 3. Walks

The spring and early summer of 2013 were very cold and this disrupted the timing of wildlife walks. For instance the walk to record Bird's Nest Orchids around Dunblane had to be delayed for 3 weeks until the flowers eventually appeared. The outcome was very successful however and a new colony was found in the beech plantation just upstream of the concrete bridge over the River Allan (NS 787 991). A walk to survey the plants and birds in the remote Arrevore Gorge north of Braco was also rewarding with several rare species being notified to the BSBI plant recorder. In July an evening stroll around Stirling University Campus under the guidance of Stirling University Nature Society was both well attended and rewarding. We located bat colonies with our new bat recorder as well as rare water-lilies and orchids. The broad-leaved helleborines in the quadrangles were not only flowering but were being pollinated by wasps .. just as predicted by Charles Darwin in his book on Orchids (1862).

## 4. Conservation and Wildlife Monitoring

- In March we helped Friends of Kings Park organise the transfer of cowslips from the field next to the M9 Stirling Services to wild flower areas in Kings Park, Plean Country Park and Gallows Hill. The original field is scheduled for development.
- One of the major threats to our own native wildlife is the spread of invasive alien species like grey squirrels, American mink, giant hogweed, Japanese knotweed etc.. During the year we have persuaded Scottish Natural Heritage to treat the huge colony of Giant Hogweed on the banks of the river Allan in the Kippen Rait Glen SAC (Special Area of Conservation). We have also successfully campaigned to prevent Stirling Council cutting it's funding of Hogweed control.
- During the summer we monitor rare plants on about thirty sites. While doing this we located two new locations near Balquidder for the Greater Butterfly orchid. Unfortunately we were unable to find either the greater or lesser butterfly orchids on their normal sites in Clacks.



Surveying for Large Heath butterflies in cotton grass its food plant on a raised bog near Blair Drummond



Cowslips were transferred from a field destined for development at the Pirnhall M9 services

Worryingly a search for the rare water-fern 'pillwort' in Loch Lubnaig only turned up a single plant and a more exhaustive search will be made in 2014.

- Our group helped with summer surveys undertaken by Stuart Bence and Lorna Blackmore of Stirling University Nature Society. One project involved documenting the distribution of Large Heath Butterfly in the raised bogs of Central Scotland. Significant numbers were found on Flanders Moss and most of its satellite mosses. This rare butterfly was also found in the Butterfly Conservation's new 'Wester Moss' nature reserve at Fallin. SUNS undertook a similar survey of purple hairstreak butterflies. They complete their life cycle in the tops of oak trees and as a result are rarely noticed. Unexpectedly the team found this beautiful butterfly in many of the local oak woodlands between Plean and Strathyre.
- The only place in the entire British Isles where Schleicher's Thread Moss remains is in a spring on the Touch Hills where it has been known since 1880. In 2011 a routine monitoring visit revealed that it has been over-run by rushes and was virtually extinct. The situation was so serious that two of the remaining stems were sent to the Natural History Museum to be kept in culture. Over the last two years the site has been visited every month and the rushes and other invasive plants removed. During this period the number of stems has increased from 50 in 2011 to a peak of 4,000 spikes in May 2013.

## 5. Protecting the Wildlife Interests Associated with Local Authority Planning

- A network of members is in place to screen local Council planning applications for their impact on wildlife. This involves a lot of work looking weekly at all the applications to both Clacks and Stirling Councils and Forestry Commission Scotland. Our membership also provides a steady stream of issues
- During the last month Stirling Council adopted its Local Development Plan. This sets out its planning policy and guidelines for the next decade. We made a number of representations to safeguard wildlife interests during the consultation phases. Several of these bore fruit. For instance the Council has recognised Local Conservation Sites (LNCS) in its planning procedures with a presumption against their development.
- The Scottish Government policy is to increase the area committed to forestry in Central Scotland by 6%. Although this does not sound much it will involve very large areas and will have major impacts on both wildlife and landscape. We have found the documentation associated with the forestry planning process hard to access and have been active in trying to improve the clarity of the planning process. We sent representations about a 600 hectare forestry application on the Ochils above Menstrie which involved two potential Local Nature Conservation Sites.
- We have been active in drawing the planning authority's attention to the need for bat surveys where there is a likely hood of bat roosts in buildings subject to demolition or modification.
- Stirling SWT is invited to a considerable number of public consultation events associated with the preplanning phase of developments. If these are judged to affect wildlife interests we try to arrange to attend.



Moth trap in action

## 6. Donated Equipment and Its Use

- The use of the moth-trap and generator purchased last year has been very productive. It was used on a number of 'Moth Nights' run by Heather Young. Locally it had 30 outings and caught 148 species of moths. Astonishingly on two nights in August over 550 moths were caught in the back garden of a house in Kings Park Stirling of which 340 were large yellow underwings.



- The camera trap which was only purchased in January has already been employed to confirm the occupancy of an unrecorded badger set in Dollar.
- The bat detector has been used to assist with the identity of potential bat roosts in areas subject to planning applications.
- A lap top and digital projector were generously donated by the Heritage Lottery Fund 2007 to help us use the new digital technology in our meetings. It has been used at 45 of our own meetings and at over 50 talks given by Stirling SWT to other outside groups.
- The Stihl brushcutter has been employed to trim a number of wildflower meadows. The only local colony of frog orchids near Kippen has been maintained by this method in the absence of grazing.

## 7. What is having the greatest detrimental effect on our wildlife?

During the Forth Naturalist and Historian's 2013 Conference entitled 'Central Scotland's Changing Biodiversity' our group organised a survey to find out what local naturalists thought were the most important factors involved in the decline of local Biodiversity. The top six factors together with the numbers of votes were:

1. **91 votes... The** Intensification of agriculture through the use of herbicides, pesticides, fertilisers together with a supportive Common Agricultural Policy
2. **74 votes ...** The spread of invasive alien species e.g. grey squirrel, mink, signal crayfish, Dutch elm disease, giant hogweed, New Zealand flatworm etc.
3. **59 votes ...** Short termism in conservation .. the duration and funding of many projects is too short to be effective.
4. **50 votes ...** Poor management of wildlife rich marginal land such as hedgerows, field margins, road verges and ditches
5. **34 votes ...** The impact of major infrastructure projects like wind farms, pylon lines, motorways, new towns and villages
6. **30 votes ...** Climate change.

## 8. Watch Group

Stirling's successful children's Watch Group run by Debbie Spray and Sue Hunter continues to put on monthly programmes.

## 9. Our Local Reserves

Rory Sandison is the Reserves Manager with responsibility for these sites ([rsandison@swt.org.uk](mailto:rsandison@swt.org.uk))

- **Alloa Inch:** (Convenor Roy Sexton). This 100 acre island reserve in the river Forth continues to attract large numbers of geese, ducks and waders. Several visits were made during the year. The gap in the surrounding embankment appears to have stopped enlarging.
- **Cambus Pools** (Convenor Roger Gooch). A new management plan has been into action during the last year. The meadows have been grazed by ponies which has stopped the expansion of reeds. It is hoped that the reeds in the pools will be dealt with in the next year. Work parties have cut back the tree and scrub growth along the river frontage. Seeding the site with yellow rattle, a parasite of grasses, has been very successful and allowed the growth 350 orchids.
- **Walk and Guide for Visitors.** Joan and John Newman produced an excellent guide to a walk along the Forth taking in our three reserves and with illustrations of the wildlife likely to be encountered. It is displayed on our website <http://www.swtstirling.org.uk/>. A new Café at Cambus will add to the attraction of the route.

## 10. The Committee

Thanks are due for the enormous amount of work done by the committee:

Chairman, Alloa Inch Reserve Convenor  
 Vice Chairman, Cambus Pools Reserve Convenor  
 Treasurer and Meetings Chairperson, Planning scrutineer  
 Membership Secretary, WEB Site organiser  
 Committee Members  
 General Secretary, LNCS organiser  
 Committee Meeting Secretary

Roy Sexton  
 Roger Gooch  
 Liz Albert  
 Jan Harbidge  
 Tony Rogers, Heather Young  
 Sue Sexton ([sextonsp@aol.com](mailto:sextonsp@aol.com))  
 Helen McLaren